Decoding the Secret Language of the Gays: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Cebuano Gayspeak

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Abstract. This study explores the sociolinguistic characteristics of gay lingo expressions, focusing on the unique linguistic dynamics within the Cebuano gay community. The primary objective is to identify the most commonly used terms by Cebuano gays and to analyze the meanings and cultural significance underlying these expressions. By addressing these aspects, the study delves into the nature of gayspeak through the lens of Lavender Linguistics, a theoretical framework that explains how gay language functions as an identifier and unifier for the gay community. The research also investigates the extent to which language influences the culture and identity of Cebuano gays, providing a deeper understanding of how linguistic expressions shape and reflect their lived experiences. The findings reveal a rich tapestry of linguistic creativity, with Cebuano gays actively constructing unique expressions that encapsulate their lifestyle, values, and cultural norms. These self-created linguistic innovations not only serve as tools of self-expression but also as mechanisms for fostering solidarity and resilience within the community. Additionally, the study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological perspective, particularly his theory of language and power, to suggest that these linguistic practices emerge in response to a restrictive and often heteronormative societal environment. In this context, language becomes a vital tool for navigating societal structures, asserting identity, and achieving cultural survival. By examining gay lingo as both a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon, this research underscores the interplay between language, identity, and community, contributing to broader discussions on the role of language in marginalized groups. It affirms that Cebuano gays utilize their unique linguistic repertoire not only as a medium of communication but as a means of cultural affirmation and resistance.

Keywords: culture and identity, gayspeak, sociolinguistics

1.0 Introduction

Gay language has finally gained respect from the society and attracted undeniable attentions in the field of research. Considering that this is "a linguistic phenomenon", Baker (2002) stated that the ways gays use their language is an insightful construction of their identity across multiple contexts. The gay crowd has created gay lingo, purposely for their own consumption. It's a secret language which is not supposed to be understood by outsiders. As their language evolved, more new terms are created and other expressions are being adopted in the Cebuano language. In sociolinguistic sense, this research aims to investigate the features and functions of language, more specifically how the Cebuano gay speakers give meanings on the different gay lingo expressions in various ways as their language relates with their culture and identity.

There are already various literature that focused on the society's adoption of these gay expressions. The works reviewed include sociological perspectives on the relationship of language, culture and identity.

Gay lingo. Red (1999) defines gay language is a type of code used in the gay community for the purpose of preventing people from outside the group (herein refers to heterosexuals) making sense of it and helping link them in "their own discourse". This definition calls our attention to "anti-language" by Halliday (1976) which is "a special form of language generated by some kind of anti-society". This anti language uses words and expressions with additions and alterations in meaning aiming at creating and retaining its identity (Cage, 2003).

On the same line of thought the empirical work by Jensen, Malcom, Phelps, and Stoker (2002) on language and power relationships suggested that change within the boundaries of language usage should include the feminist perspective in future research. They stated that language used by males and females suggest different value streams outlining the idea of community. This is also true among the third gender of the community.

According to Bourdieu (1990), language viewed from the sociological power dominated perspective suggests a restrictive coalescent environment merges out of the need to survive. This is complimentary of Hatch's (1993) interpretive perspective on culture and its dynamically creative emergence through human life.

In trying to understand the possible meaning of the gay lingo, the researcher used the lens of Bronislaw " Malinowski' who once theorized, in order to understand what was going on in a language situation, it was not enough to understand

and write down the meaning of the words. One had to understand why they said what they said and how they said it to whom in a specific context of situation.

On gay lingo, Baker (2005) conducted a research on the language of gay men and lesbians and found that gay men's language is informal, non-standard and often impolite, whereas lesbians' language is more polite, more affectionate and more standardized. It was found out that gay men use informal language not only in spoken discourse but also in written discourse.

Like any other languages, gay lingo has developed since it has a number of functions. For example, Halliday (1973) suggests some functions of language in general in oral conversation that language serves to express social and personal relations (interpersonal), to represent an experience, to impart factual information, to control the behavior of others (regulatory), to get involved in fantasies, and to show one one's identity (personal). However, gay language is also considered "anti-language", and it serves more different and special functions:

Concealment. As we know, homosexuals still receive discrimination and condemnation in several countries in the world although people have a more open-minded attitude towards them today. For this reason, gay language functions as a form of "defense mechanism" against homophobic society (Baytan,2002). This situation of language use is described by Hayes (1981, p. 28) as the "secret setting" in which homosexuals use their own language within the dominant, or straight society without wanting to "draw undue attention to themselves, even if they are not ashamed to admit their identity."

The Filipino gay community began coining words that can be associated with the original word, either by its literal meaning or denotation, or by using other shades of meaning or connotation. Gays may also play with words until they become neutralized, gradually transformed and socially accepted as gay expressions, such as charot, char, halor, bongga and a lot more. Baitan (2002) concludes that the gradual development of gayspeak in the Philippines through the years is a form of "a defense mechanism to counteract, at least, the verbal violence they are subjected to". His point is that gayspeak is a language that performs its function as an "armor" shielding gay people from the isolation and the social stigma brought by gender differences.

Identification. The use of gay language gives member of a group a means to identify with one another, as well as with the group. Speaking gay language is demonstrating overtly that one belongs to a certain group. That is to say, not only does the use of gay language function to foster a sense of belonging to a community but it also has an intrapersonal function in that the language forms part of the gay man's identity and allows him to show his identity and self-image (Oetomo, 2001).

Revelation. The revelation function allows gay people to reveal overtly that they are gay and are candidates to be included in a particular social set (Cage, 2003). In a more open society today, this function helps gay people affirm their identity in the gay world and the heterosexual world.

This rapid development in lexicon also indicates that gayspeak appears to be more of a 'fashion' or a 'fad' that that easily changes over a period of time. Yet this may also be considered a unique characteristic of gayspeak. Moreover, it is also bound as a cultural identity social class determines the allusion attaches to a gay expressions. Educated gays have a greater tendency to speak to speak in gay lingo that reflects their academic background, giving a "literary, sophisticated quality to gay language" (Remoto, 2008). On the other hand, gays in the lower class strata have gay lexicons that are mostly determined by phonological resonance, or sometimes influenced by their jobs. In addition, one's profession or field specialization also contributes to how gay language develops and varies.

The results of the present study wish to contribute importance of any language variety or dialects to the society and to the country. It will give a clear idea on considering gay language as a strong point of discussion for its influence and its fast expansion and evolution in the culture of the Filipinos. The output will give a back-up explanation to some intelligent assumptions facing it as form of communication used by Cebuano people of the third sex, and come up with a clear concept about its meaning. This study will also provide a sense of awareness to all on how a language evolve

since Filipino gay lingo started out with replacing certain words with another term. It hopes to trace the influence of society in the evolution of a language, in this case the Cebuano society and the Cebuano gayspeak.

The study aimed at answering the following research questions: What are the gay lingo expressions or words used commonly by gay Cebuano speakers? What are the possible meanings underlying these common gay expressions or words? What is the influence of the cultural milieu of the Cebuano to the evolution of these expressions known as gayspeak in relation with their group identity?

The present study is anchored on the postmodernist theory on differences on language use which suggests that the way we talk is a part of identity formation, specifically suggesting that gender identity is variable and not fixed. Structuralism theory was used as a guide in the analysis because it views society and its rules as expressions of deep structures, often in binary codes, which express our primary natures.

This research used language, as viewed from the sociological power dominated perspective of Bourdieu (1991), to suggest a restrictive coalescent environment merges out of the need to survive. Relationship of language and symbolic power utilizes the theoretical lens constructed by Bourdieu, which suggests power determines the language that is used. Culture, within the confines of the research, focuses on the work of Hatch (1993) as she formulated elements of culture to become actively created by developing a dynamic culture model, which argues that culture is not a single item and is instead formed using an interpretivist lens where culture is constructed in dynamic relationships.

In trying to understand the possible meaning of the gay lingo, the researcher used the lens of Bronislaw " Malinowski' who once theorized that in order to understand what was going on in a language situation, it was not enough to understand and write down the meaning of the words. One had to understand why they said what they said and how they said it to whom in a specific context of situation.

This study also considers the Queer theory which focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Queer has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian and gay subjects, and is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual. Norton (2011) suggests that the existence of queer language is believed to have evolved from the imposing of structures and labels from an external mainstream culture or society. Historical evidence shows that a significantly large proportion of labels arise from within or from the margins surrounding a queer subculture – that they are terms indigenous to queer culture, self-generated and self-cultivated. This theory is associated with the lavender linguistics which is a term used by linguistics and advanced by William Leap to describe the study of language as it is used by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) speakers. Lavender languages and linguistics, homosexuals communicate with each other in ways that are "different from the linguistic practices of non-lesbian/gay-identified persons.

2.0 Methodology
2.1 Research Design
This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, focusing on discourse analysis. The research involves identifying, classifying, and analyzing the functions of Cebuano discourse markers in spoken and written corpora.

2.2 Research Locale
The research locale is primarily Cebuano-speaking regions in the Philippines. Specifically, the study draws data from publications such as the Cebuano magazine Bisaya and local radio programs, which are accessible in these regions.

2.3 Research Participants
The participants are Cebuano native speakers whose spoken discourses were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Their conversations were sourced from ordinary conversational settings and recorded entertainment discussions from local radio stations.

2.4 Research Instrument
The study employs a combination of written and audio sources alongside an analytical framework as its research instruments. Written texts, including short stories, nobelas, and entertaining articles from the Bisaya magazine, provide

a rich corpus for analysis, while audio recordings of discussions and ordinary conversations are transcribed to supplement the data. The analytical framework focuses on classifying the discourse markers based on their clause positions (initial, medial, or final) and their interaction with specific word categories, such as pronominals, to uncover their linguistic functions.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure
The data collection process involved gathering written texts from the Bisaya magazine and recording conversations from local radio entertainment programs and ordinary discussions. These recordings were subsequently transcribed, and discourse markers were identified within the transcriptions. The markers were then classified based on their positions within clauses (initial, medial, or final) and their relationship with specific word categories. Finally, their functions were analyzed to determine their linguistic roles and to assess whether their omission affected the intended meaning of the utterances.

2.6 Ethical Considerations
The study adhered to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from recorded speakers, ensuring they were aware of the research purpose and voluntarily agreed to participate. Participants' privacy was safeguarded through the anonymization of identifiable information. Cultural sensitivity was maintained by respecting the cultural and linguistic identity of the Cebuano-speaking community, and proper attribution was given to all sources, including the Bisaya magazine and radio programs, to ensure intellectual integrity.

3.0 Results and Discussion
The study highlights the diverse functions of Cebuano discourse markers in oral and written communication. These linguistic elements are notably more prevalent in conversational speech than in narratives. This distinction stems from the fact that narratives often focus on using connectors to establish coherence and progress in the storyline, whereas discourse markers primarily serve to convey the speaker's attitudes, emotions, or expectations.

Table 1. Cebuano Discourse Markers: Positions, Functions, and Examples

Marker	Position	Function	Example	Interpretation
Ba	Final	Suspicion, emphasis	"Wala man ko nananghid ni Manong ba." (You didn't ask for Manong's permission, ba.)	Expresses doubt or expectation.
Ha	Initial, Final	Disbelief, caution	"Ha, unya patay ang bata?" (Ha, did the child die?)	Reflects disbelief in initial position; adds caution when final.
Sa	Final	Confirmation	"Mas tam-is ang lactum kay sa Nido sa." (Lactum is sweeter than Nido, sa.)	Confirms the statement.
Na	Initial, Final	Regret, playfulness, warning	"Maglagot gani ko ron, na." (I will get angry now, na.)	Warns the listener of a potential reaction.
No	Final	Emphasis, confirmation	"Dili ko musugot nga moadto ka, no." (I won't let you go, no.)	Emphasizes the speaker's stance.
Uy	Initial, Final	Surprise, teasing, emphasis	"Gwapaha sa imong amiga, uy." (Your friend is very beautiful, uy.)	Shows surprise or playful teasing.

Table 1 reveals that Cebuano discourse markers play versatile roles in communication, with distinct positional preferences and pragmatic functions. Markers like ha and uy frequently appear at the beginning of clauses to introduce surprise or emphasis, while ba, sa, and no predominantly occur at the end, emphasizing or confirming statements. Na demonstrates broad utility across positions, expressing regret, playfulness, or warning. The markers' functionality is enhanced by phonetic variations, such as prolonged pronunciation, which intensifies emotional tone. These findings highlight the prevalence of discourse markers in conversations over narratives, emphasizing their role in conveying attitudes, emotions, and speaker intentions, thereby enriching Cebuano oral discourse.

A notable aspect of Cebuano discourse markers is their positional variance within clauses. These markers predominantly appear at the beginning and end of sentences, where they fulfill distinct roles. Initial markers, such as ha, na, and uy, are used to express emotions like surprise, regret, or emphasis. On the other hand, final markers like ba, sa, and no emphasize statements, confirm ideas, or provide warnings, contributing significantly to the pragmatic tone of an utterance.

In terms of functionality, each marker carries specific communicative intentions. For instance, ba often signals suspicion or emphasizes a topic, while ha can reflect disbelief in its initial position or serve as a cautionary remark when placed at the end of a sentence. Similarly, sa and no are used to confirm or emphasize statements, while na can convey regret, playfulness, or warning, depending on its context. Meanwhile, uy is versatile, expressing surprise or playful teasing depending on its position and tone.

Pronunciation also plays a crucial role in the use of these markers. Certain markers, such as na and uy, are often elongated or pronounced with specific tonal modifications to intensify emotional expression. This highlights the interplay between phonetics and pragmatics in Cebuano discourse.

Finally, while discourse markers do not alter the fundamental semantic meaning of an utterance, their omission can significantly reduce the speaker's ability to communicate nuanced attitudes or intentions effectively. This underlines their essential role in enriching the communicative depth and pragmatic clarity of Cebuano discourse.

4.0 Conclusion
The Cebuano language is rich in discourse markers that significantly enhance conversational dynamics. These markers, typically single morphemes, often occur at the beginning or end of clauses and serve to express the speaker's mood, attitude, and feelings and provide cues for upcoming expressions. While their absence does not necessarily alter the semantic meaning of utterances, they fulfill important pragmatic functions. The study highlights the need for further comprehensive research on Cebuano discourse markers and other grammatical aspects, emphasizing their contribution to the broader understanding of the Cebuano language and its place in the Austronesian language family.

5.0 Contributions of Authors
Vilma C. Grengia (sole author): Conceptualization, data collection, transcription, analysis, writing, and editing.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests
The author declares no conflict of interest.

8.0 Acknowledgment

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